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ABSTRACT

This report provides an overview of primary education in Norway. Discussion focuses on: (1) provisions relating to compulsory basic education and characteristics of the school system; (2) local education authority; (3) regional authority; (4) national authority; (5) organization of the schools; (6) curriculum guidelines and the model plan for teaching in the basic school; (7) cooperation between school and home; (8) the education of the Sami people; (9) the education of other minority groups; (10) assessment and evaluation; (11) distribution of subjects and periods and the allocation of teaching periods; and (12) problems and trends in primary education, including funding methods, ways to achieve national standards while increasing local autonomy, easing of the transition from preschool to primary education, increasing the number of teachers and decreasing teacher load, removing sex bias, introducing computer technology, and retaining teachers. A note about private schools in Norway concludes the report. (RH)

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Primary education in Norway

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Strasbourg 1988

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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

Project No. 8 - Innovation in Primary Education

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NORWAY

Report submitted by the Norwegian authorities

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Basic school education

Provisiones relating to compulsory basic education have existed in Norway since the first part of the 18th century (1739). Cumpulsory schooling of 9 years' duration was established by law in 1969.

According to the Basic School Act of 13 June 1969 and the supplementary Act of 13 June 1975 the purpose of the basic school is:

> "... in understanding of and collaboration with the home, to help give the pupils a Christian and moral upbringing, to develop their mental and physical abilities, and to give them a good general knowledge, so that they can become useful and self-reliant human beings both in their homes and in the community. The school shall further freedom and tolerance for the creation of productive forms of co-operation between teachers and pupils and between school and home".

Through a revision of the Basic School Act in 1975 handicapped children have also been entitled to teaching provided in the regular basic schools. The fundamental principle of this revision was to integrate as far as possible all handicapped children into the ordinary 9-year comprehensive basic school. For certain groups of severely handicapped pupils specialised institutions will necessarily be maintained in the future also. Special schools for different groups are mainly run by the state.

It is worth mentioning that the 9-year basic school is completely comprehensive with practically very little organised differentiation outside the classroom. The aim of the basic school is to offer all children an education which is adapted to the individual's ability and which is whithin the individual's capabilities. This principle applies equally to the education of children with learning difficulties and handicaps and to children with particular learning abilities, be they theoretical, practical, physical or aesthetic. Everything which takes place in the school must take this principle into consideration, and the school must see to it that the principle of suitability of the education offered to every pupil is upheld and integrated into the day-to-day life of the school.

Each class is kept together as a unit at least from the 1st to the 6th grade, and in many cases even to the 9th grade.

In Norway, there are three levels of public administration: the national level, the regional level and the local level.

Local authorities

Norway har 454 municipalities, or local government units, which are responsible for ensuring that all children receive education and that compulsory schooling is carried out in accordance with the general directions drawn up by the Education Act and regulations drawn up by the Ministry of Church and Education. The municipalities are responsible for building and organising and maintaining primary and lower secondary schools.

The supreme authority in local administration is the local council, a body elected by popular ballot for a four-year period. The council appoints a school board to deal with educational matters. The board may have between 7 and 35 members, depending on the size of the area in question, and the political parties are represented in the same proportion as on the directly elected council. Its tasks include, for example, the appointment of teachers, decisions about priorities in financial budgeting, curriculum and teaching. The board also appoints a school superintendent for the municipality. His or her office serves as the secretariat for the school board. The composition of the school board reflects the relative strength of the local political parties.

Regional level

In order to ensure that the development of compulsory schools is properly coordinated, a director of schools is appointed in each county. The director is appointed by the Crown and represents the Government.

One of the duties of the school director is to ensure that laws and regulations applying to the basic school are observed by local authorities. As more authority has increasingly been transferred to the local school boards, the school directors have been given more

pedagogical functions. Such functions include assistance to local school authorities in matters concerning innovation in schools and in service training of teachers.

Another important task is to supervise the equality of education provided throughout the country.

National level

The National Assembly has the supreme political power in the country. As far as education is concerned, this involves legislative and budgetary authority at all levels of the system. Through legislation the National Assembly determines the basic pattern of education by laying down the aims, structure and contents of education to be provided.

The Ministry of Church and Education is the supreme administrative authority for compulsory education. An advisory body, the Basic School Council, assists the Ministry in developing the education within the compulsory schools.

Organisation of schools

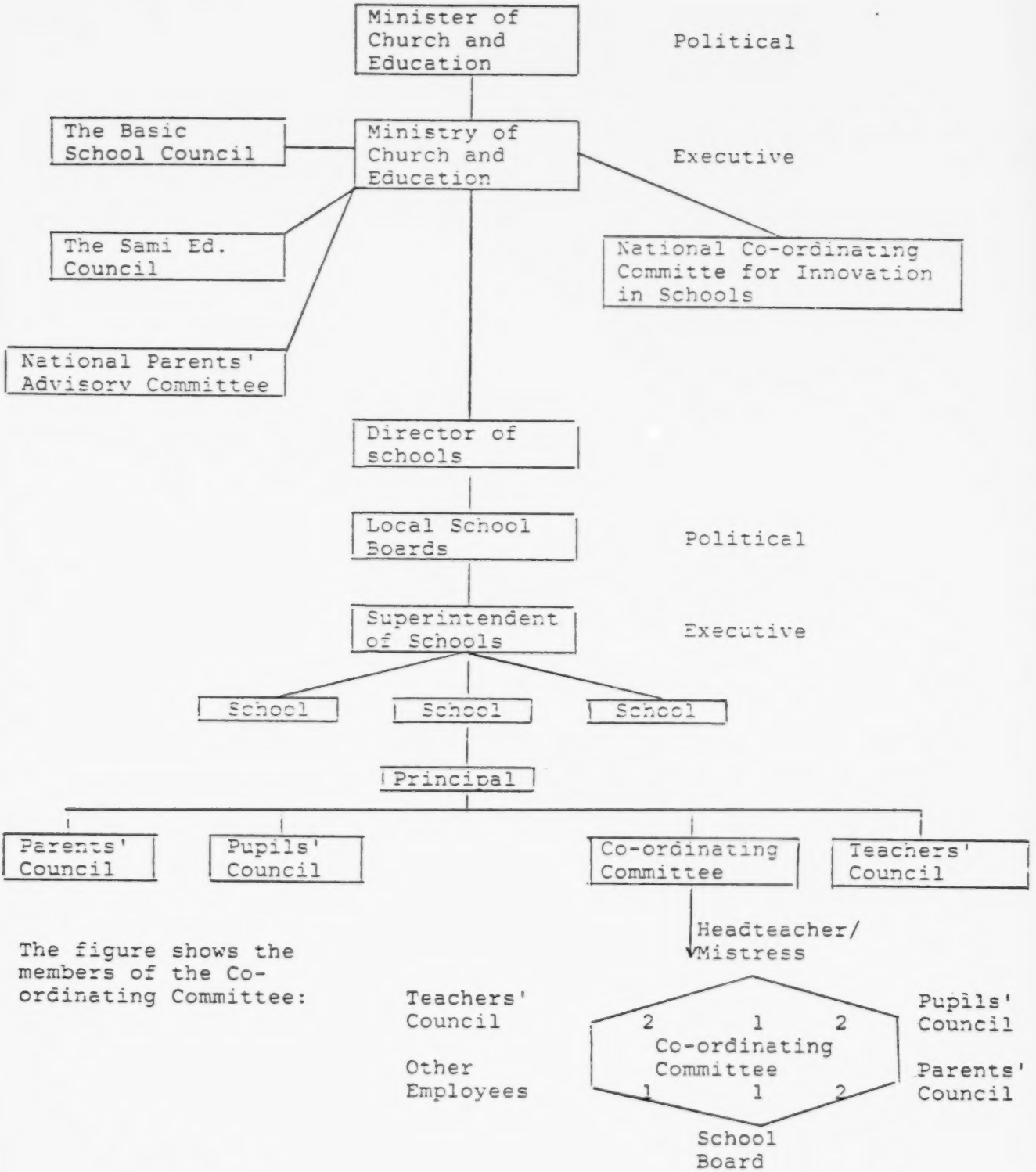
Compulsory education in Norway is organised and run by public authorities, with very few exceptions. With the passing of the 1969 Education Act compulsory education was extended from seven to nine years. Accordning to this act the compulsory school is divided into a primary stage comprising grades 1-6 and a lower secondary stage comprising grades 7-9.

Classes 1-6: primary (age 7-12)

Classes 7-9: lower secondary (age 13-15)

The links between primary education (stage 1-6) and lower secondary education (stage 7-9) are good. More than 1 000 of 3 500 schools are combined, primary and lower secondary stages in the same school building.

The administration of the basic school:



The figure shows the members of the Co-ordinating Committee:

Curriculum Guidelines (The model plan, M 87)

The Basic School Act authorises the Ministry of Church and Education to draw up a model plan for teaching in the basic school. In 1984, the Ministry of Church and Education decided that the then current Curriculum Guidelines from 1974 should be revised. The task of revision was given to the Basic School Council. A draft document was developed and distributed to all schools and educational bodies in Norway, the resulting comments and reactions worked into the guidelines and the final version delivered to the Ministry og Church and Education in 1985, as a recommendation from the Council.

The National Assembly wanted to discuss the Guidelines before they were published. In response to this request, a preliminary edition of the Guidelines was published early in 1986, parallel with the preparation of a White Paper to be submitted to the Storting. The debate held in the Storting early in 1987 formed the basis for the wording of the ultimate revised edition of the Curriculum Guidelines, the model plan, published in August 1987 (M 87).

The model plan stipulates that a high degree of responsibility for curriculum and syllabus content at basic school level is to be delegated to the various schools and school boards. This involves responsibility and authority being decentralised and given to those who, individually or collectively, are closely connected with the school and its day-to-day activities.

The model plan is based on the principle that classes are to be kept together from the primary stage through the lower secondary stage of education and to the end of cumpulsory schooling. To the extent that differentiation is needed, the main approach should be individual differentiation within heterogenous classes or in temporary groups within the class. There is no repeating of grades.

Handicapped children are integrated into the regular classrooms, their programmes being set up in cooperation between the classroom teacher and the special education teacher. A small number of disable children, estimated at one percent, attend special schools or specially designated classes. The integration of handicapped children has come about through a slow but steady development over the past twenty-year period. Although

there has been general agreement on the principle of integration, there has been and still is, controversy over questions related to practical solutions.

The class is regarded as an important unit in Norwegian schools, both socially and educationally. A class teacher is responsible for each class, including, as far as possible, coordination between any subject teachers. At the primary level the use of subject teachers is kept to a minimum.

At lower secondary level there are several subject teachers in all classes, but even at this stage the class teacher has a coordinating function. The question of class teachers vs. subject teachers has been a matter of some debate in recent years. In an attempt to combine these two somewhat conflicting considerations, organised team teaching has emerged as a form of organisation which is now recommended. Team teaching may be organised in various practical ways, but quite frequently we find a form of organisation where three teachers share the responsibility for teaching and coordinating the work of two classes.

One of the underlying principles of the Curriculum Guidelines is the necessity to take care of the basic human needs of the pupils. Pupils must feel that they belong, and that they have a part to play in the whole - a part which includes taking responsibility for and having a say in what happens in the school. Therefore, the principle of pupil participation is given increased importance in relation to the 1974 Guidelines, and is to be found integrated throughout the whole of the Curriculum Guidelines.

Co-operation between school and home

Related to this principle is the emphasis which is put on the interactive relationship between home, school and the local community, all of which have a responsibility as regards the environment in which young people grow up. There is genuine concern that parents should have a real influence on what happens in the school, and that the school should respect and take into account the differing values which children meet at home, be they religious, political or cultural. Cooperation between home, school and the local community is regarded as necessary

if pupils are to see school as meaningful and related to their past and present experience outside the physical surroundings of the school building.

Sami education

The Curriculum Guidelines include a special section on Sami education, with the teaching hours and the subjects being distributed in a way which takes consideration of the right of the Sami people to an education which is non-discriminatory seen in relation to the rest of Norwegian society. In addition, Sami history and culture are included in the Guidelines as topics which all Norwegian pupils should be familiar with.

Minority groups

Other language minorities have also been taken into account. These include small groups who have lived in Norway for a long time as well as the more recent immigrant minority groups. Emphasis is put on the necessity to provide teaching in both the child's mother tongue and the Norwegian language. Children of minority groups must be given the same opportunities as Norwegian pupils, and the school has a central role to play in fostering understanding, acceptance and respect for those with different backgrounds.

Assessment and evaluation

The model plan lays down the main guidelines for evaluating basic school pupils, while detailed regulations for parent-teacher contact, reports and marks are to be found in the instructions for the basic school.

In relation to previous curricula, the present Curriculum Guidelines propose broader and more varied forms of assessment at all levels. Emphasis is put on forms of assessment which are suitable for providing guidance to pupils and stimulating and supporting the learning process.

It is stressed in the instructions that the school must maintain good contact with parents and guardians. At least twice a year parents and guardians must be informed of their child's progress at school, either through personal meetings or by means of written reports.

At the junior stage (ie for the first six school years) no marks are given. At the lower secondary stage (years 7 to 9) pupils are given marks for compulsory subjects twice a year.

Formal assessment at the lower secondary level used to be related to group norms. Presently, we are in the process of shifting the emphasis from norm related assessment to assessment related directly to the educational objectives of the Curriculum Guidelines. The challenge is now to develop practical assessment material and tools which can comprise the whole range of aims and objectives presented in the Guidelines.

Distribution of subjects and periods - allocation of teaching periods

In the basic school the school year consists of 37 weeks for pupils and 38 for teachers. This means that teachers are to spend one week - ie 40 hours - in the course of the year in in-service training or on organised planning.

The school week is five days, and the time pupils spend at school per week varies from age group to age group, and ranges from 15-18 lessons per week in the first year to 30 lessons per week in the final year. Minimum weekly lessons for all years at the primary level (grades 1-6) taken together is 138, for the three years of lower secondary school the minimum is 90 weekly lessons.

The allocation of time to the various subjects is given in the Curriculum Guidelines in terms of weekly lessons per subject for each of the three year blocks of compulsory education, presented in the following table:

Subject	Primary stage			Lower sec. stage
	Years 1-3	Years 4-6	Total years 1-6	Years 7-9
Religious Instruction	6	6	12	6
Norwegian	17	16	33	14
Mathematics	11	11	22	11
English		7	7	9
Civics	6	15	21	
Social Studies				9
Natural Science				8
Music	3	6	9	3
Arts and Crafts	4	12	16	5
Physical Education	4	6	10	8
Home Economics		3	3	4
Optional subjects				11
Pupil and class council	30 2)	60 2)	90 2)	2
PSCW 1)	50 2)	75 2)	125 2)	50 2)
Total	51	82	133	90
At local disposal			5	
Total			138	90

1) Practical, social and cultural work

2) Total number of lessons in the three year period. The activities are integrated into all subjects.

Problems and trends in primary education

During the last few years a trend towards greater decentralisation of educational authority from the Ministry to regional/local education authorities has been further implemented. This is now being applid even to the financial sector, allowing the municipalities to have a greater influence on how sums of money allocated to them are to be spent.

Previously the government covered its part of the expenditure for the operation and constuction of basic schools through a highly differentiated system of "ear-marked" subsidies. As from 1 January 1986, most of these subsidies have been abandoned and replaced by a sector grant system. This means that the central education authorities no longer have the same financial means of controlling educational expenditure at the local and regional levels.

At the same time, it is essential to balance the policy objective towards greater local autonomy with the need of ensuring equal standards throughout the country. The latter objective will now have to be catered for mainly through legal provisions, and a number of amendments of the school Acts have thus been adopted.

Experiments will be launched with a view to getting a more gentle transition from pre-school to primary education. The government considers that all children from the age of 6 should gradually be enabled to receive pedagogical training according to their maturity. One of the options may be to lower the school starting age from 7 to 6, and thus in the long term possibly to extend the duration of compulsory education from 9 to 10 years.

According to the Curriculum Guidelines both local education authorities and individual schools have more freedom to develop their own local curricula, or more precisely to adapt the national Curriculum Guidelines according to local needs and conditions. The policy of decentralisation is also pursued in the field of research and development work. This implies greater freedom for individual schools to initiate innovative programmes.

After a period characterised by major structural reforms attention is now being paid to the content and quality of educational provisions, and more emphasis is being laid on the school's responsibility for transmitting skills and knowledge required in all ways of life.

Due to a marked reduction in the birth rate in recent years, the annual national intake in Norwegian basic school is rapidly decreasing, a trend which will continue in the years to come. As for the school year 1985-86 the annual intake was about 530 000 as compared to 590 000 in 1980-81. The annual intake makes it possible to raise educational standards in certain priority areas.

The allocation per pupil has at the same time increased. For the school year 1985-86 the number of pupils decreased by 15 000, eg 2.8%, whereas the allocations decreased by only 0,7%. There has also been a general improvement of standards in the sense that the maximum number of pupils per class has been reduced from 30 to 28, first in the lower grades. Similarly, the teaching duty of the teachers at the primary level has been reduced from 29 to 27 lessons. Resulting from this reform 1 400 new teaching posts had to be established from the 1984-85 school year.

A programme of action for equal status between the sexes was concluded in 1985. However, resources have been allocated in the budgets with a view to ensuring a continued effort towards equality of opportunity in education. This applies especially to measures aiming at motivating girls to choose untraditional patterns of training.

A 4-year programme for the introduction of computer technology in schools was launched in 1984. The implementation of this programme is a top priority area. Data equipment is now being purchased for a number of experimental schools, teachers are undergoing an extensive programme of in-service courses and software is being developed, taking into account national values and traditions.

An important amendment of the Basic School Act applies to the education of Sami pupils, eg pupils belonging to an ethnical minority group mostly to be found in the northern regions of the country. As from 1 August 1985 all pupils with a Sami background who live in the central Sami districts are entitled to be educated in their mother tongue in all subjects.

It is worth mentioning that the teachers' organisations have expressed dissatisfaction with their working conditions and levels of salary. A certain drift of qualified teachers from the school to the private sector has been observed. Some school boards, espesially in remote and sparsely populated areas, have experienced difficulties in attracting a sufficient number of qualified teachers. In order to stimulate teachers to seek employment in these areas, the Ministry of Education has adopted a series of measures (additional salary, paid leave of absence etc.).

Private schools

The Norwegian educational system is predominantly a public one. There are, however a limited number of private schools at various levels, which operate with the help of state grants, pursuant to law. A new Act on state grants to private schools has been put into force from 1 January 1985. When proposing this Act the government made it clear that private schools have a right to exist side by side with public schools, ie state, county and local authority schools. However, according to the government's view, private schools shall primarily be considered as supplementary and are not supposed to compete with the public school system. One of the implications of the new Act is that schools based on an alternative pedagogy, such as the Steiner schools, are now entitled to government grants.